DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 265 CS 212 415

AUTHOR Vilscek, Elaine
TITLE Sensing Story Elements and Structure in Good Literature, the Models for Children's Writing.
PUB DATE Feb 90
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Southwest Regional Conference of Authorship (18th, Alberquerque, NM, February 8-10, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Authors; *Childrens Literature; Creative Writing; Elementary Education; Illustrations; *Reading Writing Relationship; *Writing Improvement; Writing Instruction; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Authorship; *Childrens Writing; Story Structure; Writing Development; *Writing Models

ABSTRACT

Quality children's literature can model a wide range of effective writing and illustrating techniques. When exposed to good models of writing, children can be encouraged to reflect on how authors and illustrators have shaped a story, and literary elements, story structure, and design can be identified. As children progress in their understanding of story elements and structure, they should be exposed to varied styles of authorship. Their awareness can be heightened by engaging them in creative responses to good books. As they internalize these models, they begin to take risks with them in their own writing. The valuing of authorship can be promoted through the creation of a writer's studio which includes: some things/ways to highlight the techniques and story craft employed by an adult author or illustrator of renown; some things/ways to highlight classroom student authors and illustrators; and varieties of tools for writing and illustrating. (Periodicals that publish children's original work, publishers' addresses, books on children's authors and illustrators, multi-media production companies, and instruction charts in literary elements of story and design are included. Twenty-four references, including children's books, are attached.) (MG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED321265

"Sensing Story Elements and Structure in Good Literature, the Models for Children's Writing"

Dr. Elaine Vilscek

Professor of Elementary Education

University of Northern Colorado

McKee Hall 213

Greeley, Colorado 80639

Submitted to:

The New Mexico Journal of Reading

Patricia Tarry-Stevens, Co-Editor

1200 Calle del Sol NE

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DR. ELAINE VILSCEK

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS212415

Running head: SENSING STORY ELEMENTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

One of the most rewarding things about working with young authors is observing their growing pride in ownership of the stories they've written. Feeling good about what they have produced is a natural stimulus for them to continue writing and to increase their authorship. What an ideal opportunity this desire to improve their own products lends to using good literature as models with children.

Quality children's literature can model a wide range of effective writing and illustrating techniques. When exposed to these good models of writing, children can be encouraged to reflect on the ways authors and illustrators have shaped a story. As pupils' needs become evident, the teacher can direct instructional focuses on how authors or illustrators present a message, use figurative language to style a story, employ appropriate mechanics of punctuation and paragraph structure, or create settings that are consistent with the cultural context of story events. The anticipated outcome is that pupils' writing will improve as a result of a heightened sense of a good story.

How a teacher builds upon a child's natural sense of story, extends understandings about the structure and development of a story, identifies good books that can serve as models, and further highlights the worth of an author's or illustrator's contributions are critical considerations. An address of these issues is presented in this article.

Children's Sense of Story

The relationships between children's sense of story, thinking, and ownership in writing have been examined and reported over the years. Investigators agree that children's concepts of story, story schema begin very early in the preschool years. Storytelling is very essential and is used by children as they tell about and retell experiences.

Through this process of creating and recreating their world, children internalize and demonstrate ownership of their stories of experiences. By the onset of the elementary school years, many youngsters have acquired the concept of a story. Use of story markers, such as Once upon a time, The end, and They lived happily ever after are evidences that children are beginning to understand story structure (Applebee, 1980; Hardy, 1978; and VanDongen, 1987). Exposing youngsters to stories that they can listen to and view further develops their sense of story. The understandings that stories are organized in predictable ways, that stories include patterns, and that authors/illustrators use specific techniques of craft evolve. Literary elements of story, story structure and design can be subsequently identified.

Children's growing sense of story becomes apparent in the primary grades as they begin to verbalize plot by enumerating the sequences of events that occur. Recognition of uncomplicated story settings and traits of characterization follows. A book's format, size, and other print features are emulated in children's own publications.

As youngsters progress in their understanding of story elements and structure, they should be exposed to varied styles of authorship. Differences in the ways authors develop patterns in sentences, use figurative language, construct dialogue vs. narration, and employ characteristics specific to genre can be instructional focuses that encourage writer experimentation. By intermediate grade levels, pupils can realize that stories contain a theme and can explain how this thread cohesively holds an author's perspective or message together. Sense of story structure and overall design have been collectively emerging. And, an appreciation of good literature as models has naturally evolved.

Identifying Good Books as Models for Writing

Children's awareness of story elements and structure can be heightened by engaging them in creative responses to good books. When elementary graders recognize and appreciate the ways authors craft characterization, plot, setting, theme, style and format, they begin to internalize these models and take risks in using them in their own writing. The result, as verified in the research findings of Fitzgerald and Spiegel (1983), and VanDongen (1987), is that good books as models lend security to emergent authors. Their writing is also improved in clarity, design, and overall quality.

The degree to which a teacher should encourage her pupils to write fluently as well as urge them to produce a quality writing product is frequently questioned. An address of this issue is

presented by Gail Tompkins in her 1990 publication entitled, Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product. Tompkins states that teachers need to foster children's writing fluency and risk taking. But doing so, she suggests, does not preclude instruction about how to design elements of a story or how to edit a writing product.

Instructing pupils about story elements and structure does require a teacher's preparation. Knowledge about the elements of story and collecting stories that illustrate the element to be presented to children are essential. A teacher should also plan to read a number of stories that illustrate the literary element of focus to the children.

When children are learning about an element of story, such as plot, characterization, setting or style, a presentation of the story element and how the author may have developed it are essential. Engaging the children in activities that enable them to experience the specifics of an author's techniques of craft is also important. For example, in the book, Jumanji, Chris Van Allsburg models plot progression to climax superbly through his compelling stringing of story events. Children can experience this technique by retelling the story of Jumanji through their labeled drawings that frame each sequential story development. Other examples of pupil engagement activities that enable children to experience a specific author's crafting of a story element include: pupils' uses of puppetry to experience and to project how Roald Dahl employs negative character traits to elicit a reader's interest in The Twits, pupils' designs of story

time lines to reflect the congruency between time and setting achieved by authors such as Alice and Martin Provensen in The Glorious Flight Across the Channel, and pupils' sketches of the mental images that Jane Yolen elicits through figurative expressions in the book, Owl Moon.

To reinforce further the children's sensitivities to and understandings about the development of story elements, writing response activities are also recommended. These activities may include rewriting, redesigning, or extending some story elements that are modeled in good books. Written response activities also serve as appropriate rehearsals of the authorship techniques that children may employ later in their independent writing.

There is a multitude of literary selections that may be used as models of story elements, structure, and design. Books generally lend excellent potential examples of the techniques employed by an author or illustrator in the development of plot, characterization, setting, style, theme, and overall format. The charts on "Instruction in Literary Elements of Story and Design" that follow address this potential and include: Listings and partial definitions of each element of story: Examples of book selection models per element; Suggested pupil engagement activities that facilitate literary sensitivity and beginning understandings about the elements; and, Writing response activities that serve as a practice for later writing.

Insert Charts About Here

Highlighting the Worth of Authorship and Illustratorship

Though pride in writing evolves naturally when the final product meets the approval of peers and the teacher, added recognition of worth can stimulate enjoyment of good writing. One of the ways the valuing of authorship can be promoted, in a classroom context, is through the creation of a writer's studio. The three categories of ingredients in such a studio are: some things/some ways to highlight the techniques and story craft employed by an adult author or illustrator of renown; some things/some ways to highlight classroom student authors and illustrators; and varieties of tools for writing and illustrating.

A number of commercially produced videos, sound filmstrips, and audio tapes can be rented or purchased as devices for focusing on a popular adult author or illustrator of children's books. Weston Woods, Inc., Random House, and Miller Brody are among the distributors of these multi-media materials that reveal how authors and illustrators create. Books that cite biographical information about children's writers and illustrators are also available in many school and public libraries. Companies that publish numbers of books by a popular author or illustrator may be contacted to secure annotated advertisements about the books as well as publicity profiles about the author/illustrator. And, displays of book copies, samples of art materials that are unique to specific illustrators, or photos of author/illustrator celebrities from periodicals are other modes for highlighting within a Writer's Studio context.

A parallel focus on children who are classroom authors and illustrators can be similarly accomplished. Video interviews, books or illustrations by pupil authors, biographical and auto-biographical sketches, photos of a budding author, and a time set for a featured child author or illustrator autograph session serve effectively. Children may also enjoy sending their original work to selected periodicals that publish such manuscripts.

The availability of special tools for pupil authors and illustrators are considerations within the third category of ingredients that can enhance a classroom Writer's Studio. A special table or desk with a label, Author/Illustrator At Work, is an added attractor. Varieties of print/production instruments, visual arts materials, and graphics design tools (i.e., calligraphy pens, collage scraps, construction and poster paper, paints, computer word processing and graphics programs, editing guideline charts, etc.) can be placed on or near the labeled table.

Allotting classroom space for a Writer's Studio and equipping it with instructionally enhancing ingredients for focusing on child and adult authored or illustrated publications are of much benefit in encouraging the craft of pupil authors. The categorized suggestions of highlighting devices are but a few that creative teachers may employ and extend.

Summary

Good children's literature contains a wealth of artistry that models and fosters creative writing. Sensing and understanding how

story plot, setting. characterization, style, theme, and format are crafted by authors and illustrators can lead to improved pupil writing. Pride in products, increased pupil publication, and a heightened enjoyment of books also emerge and remain as an excellent foundation for lifelong experiences through literature.

REFERENCES

Applebee, A. N. (1980). Children's narratives: new directions. The Reading Teacher, 34, 137-142.

Fitzgerald, J., and Spiegel, D. L. (1983). Enhancing children's reading comprehension through instruction in narrative structure. Journal of Reading Behavior, 15, 1-17.

Hardy, B. (1978). Towards a poetics of fiction: An approach through narrative. In M. Meek, A. Warlow, & G. Barton. (Eds.), The Cool Web. New York: Atheneum.

Moir, H., Cain, M., & Prosak-Beres, L. (1990). Collected Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom. Boston: Christopher-Gordon.

Talbot, B. (1990). Writing for learning in school: Is it possible? Language Arts, 67(1), 47-56.

Tompkins, G. (1990). Teaching writing: Balancing process and product. Ohio: Merrill.

VanDongen, R. (1987). Children's narrative thought, at home and at school. Language Arts, 64(1), 79-87.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS CITED

Aardema, V. (1975). Why mosquitoes buzz in people's ears. New York: Dial.

Anno, M. (1988). In shadowland. New York: Orchard Books.

Blos, J. (1979). A gathering of days: A new england girl's journal, 1830-32. New York: Aladdin Books.

Cleary, B. (1983). Dear Mr. Henshaw. New York: Dell.

Cole, B. (1985). The slimy book. New York: Random House.

Dahl, R. (1982). The twits. New York: Bantam.

Freedman, R. (1987). Lincoln: A photo-biography. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Hooks, W. (1987) Moss gown. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Lowry, L. (1989). Number the stars. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

MacLachan, P. (1985). Sarah, plain and tall. New York: Harper and Row.

Martin, B. & Archambault, J. (1985). The ghost-eye tree. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Provensen, A. (1983). The glorious flight across the channel with Louis Bleriot. New York: Viking Press.

Smith, R.K. (1984). The war with grandpa. New York: Dell.

Spier, P. (1977). Noah's ark. New York: Doubleday.

VanAllsburg, C. (1988). Two bad ants. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Willard, Nancy (1981). A Visit to William Blake's Inn. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Jovanovich.

Yolen, Ann (1987). Owl moon. New York: Philomel.

SOME PERIODICALS THAT PUBLISH CHILDREN'S ORIGINAL WORK

* Children's Digest (8-10 yr. olds)

* Children's Playmate (8-14 yr. olds)

** Cricket (6-12 yr. olds)

* Highlights for Children (2-12 yr. olds)

* Humpty Dumpty's Magazine (4-6 yr. olds)

* Jack and Jill (6-8 yr. olds)

*** Penny Power (8-14 yr. olds)

**** Ranger Rick (6-12 yr. olds)

PUBLISHERS AND ADDRESSES

* Children's Better Health Institute
Benjamin Franklin Literary & Medical
Society, Inc.
P. O. Box 10681
Des Moines, IA 50336

** Open Court Publishing Co.
1058 Eighth Street
La Salle, IL 61301

*** Penny Power Magazine
Consumers Union
256 Washington Street
Mount Vernon, NY 10553

**** National Wildlife Federation
1412 Sixteenth St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036

BOOKS ON CHILDREN'S AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATORS

Jones, D. (Ed.). (1988). Children's media marketplace.
New York: Neal-Schuman Inc.

Nakamura, J. (Ed.). (1987). Children's authors and illustrators.
Detroit: Gale Research Co.

Rollock, B. (1988). Black authors and illustrators of children's books.
New York: Garland.

MULTI-MEDIA PRODUCTION COMPANIES CITED

Miller Brody; 342 Madison Avenue; New York, New York 10017

Random House; 400 Hahn Road; Westminster, Maryland 21157

Weston Woods; Weston Ct. 06883-1199; Northbrook, Illinois 60062

INSTRUCTION IN LITERARY ELEMENTS OF STORY AND DESIGN

Element of Story	Book Models	Pupil Engagement Activities that Facilitate Literary Sensitivity and Understanding	Writing Response/ Rehearsal Activities
Plot (How the story evolves, What makes it evolve How or when tension is produced)	Jumanji by Chris Van Allsburg	Discussion about the strong & compelling string of story events; Construction of story frames to depict these to climax, to denouement	Rewriting the story to include self in a parallel string of main events
	Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears by Verna Aardema	Reflection on emotions associated with the sequence of events that indicate tension in the story.	Small groups' illustrating and redesign of predicted outcomes based on a possible different series of story events and tensions (i.e., the animals decide to put the monkey who killed the owlet to death.)
	War with Grandpa by Robert Kimmel Smith	Attention to and discussion of how the author hooks the reader with promises of next event or happening, as the plot develops.	Writing a potential continued story for five editions of a class newspaper (*Note: each of the four story portions should hook the reader to want the next.)

Element of Story	Book Models	Pupil Engagement Activities that Facilitate Literary Sensitivity and Understanding	Writing Response/ Rehearsal Activities
Characterization (Traits, descriptions of behaviors of story actors)	The Ghost Eye Tree by Bill Martin and John Archambault	Discussion of characteristics and traits of main character; focus on behaviors that contribute to traits of bravery.	Changing the personality of main character to a contrasting opposite; Rewriting the story in small groups from the character's perspectives.
	Sarah, Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachlan	Attention to how the author reveals a character's traits by what others say about the character	Assuming the role of a main character in the story and writing a monologue from that character's perspective.
	The Twits by Roald Dahl	Participation in a living Photo Charades (i.e., Pupils role play character actions & facial expressions that reflect characters' gross behaviors.)	Adding a new character to those already identified in the story--building that new character's behaviors in sync with character traits described or labeled.

Element of Story	Book Models	Pupil Engagement Activities that Facilitate Literary Sensitivity and Understanding	Writing Response/ Rehearsal Activities
Setting (Where the story takes place; How specific and identifiable the setting is; How consistent the setting is with story plot, action, etc.)	The Glorious Flight: Across the Channel With Louis Bleriot by Alice and Martin Provensen	Discussion and development of a time line of events and including some cue to location of of the event, to weather elements in the text or in illustrations of an event; note of how story events may change setting.	Drawing and labeling the resetting of story, in another time, in another place, or with a different emphasis on the weather.
	A Gathering of Days by Joan Blos	Discussion of journals as a chronicle of life's events and where the event occurred;	Writing a personal journal entry that includes an account of the event, the date or time, and the place.
	Moss Gown by William Hooks	Reflection on the Cinderella Theme in this story - how plot, time, and action related to the theme and were kept consistent with the story setting.	Designing an invitation to a Cinderella-type dance event that reflects settings hypothesized for future centuries (i.e., 24th Century, etc.)

Element of Story	Book Models	Pupil Engagement Activities that Facilitate Literary Sensitivity and Understanding	Writing Response/ Rehearsal Activities
Style (Sentence patterns, the genre, figurative language, dialogue vs. narration, colorful & vivid words)	A Visit to Wm. Blake's Inn by Nancy Willard	Discussion of figurative expressions from perspective of personification included in the various poems; participation in a Breath of Life Activity. (pupils brainstorm expressions that reflect elements personified in a T.V. commercial or program.)	Removing the element of personification from any favorite story (i.e., Mike Mulligan's Steam Shovel or The Little Engine that Could) to observe effect on written story interest value.
	Owl Moon by Jane Yolen	Reflection on how comparisons are drawn through use of "similes" in the poem; have pupils participate in the True Etch of A Sketch, using an easel on which to illustrate the literal meaning of similes.	Creating a new scene for Owl Moon and labeling it with an appropriately written simile that reflects the poetic rather than literal.
	Dear Mr. Henshaw by Beverly Cleary	Discussion of "direct dialogue" employed by the author, as the main character's mode of expression.	Writing own letters to Mr. Henshaw, that include direct dialogue.

Element of Story	Book Models	Pupil Engagement Activities that Facilitate Literary Sensitivity and Understanding	Writing Response/ Rehearsal Activities
Theme (The cohesive thread, idea, or message that holds the story together)	The Slimy Book by Babette Cole	Attention to how the author presents a cohesive focus through the use of vivid sensory examples.	Writing brief descriptive sensory riddles that require a peer response.
	Two Bad Ants by Chris Van Allsburg	Examination of illustrations in the book as they cohesively present the story from the visual perspective of the two ants who are accurately contrasted in size to other objects.	Developing a whole class picture book that reflects this pattern of theme cohesiveness through sizes in illustrations.
	Number the Stars by Lois Lowry	Discussion of how the author presents the unifying message that human decency and pride can exist within the chaotic realm of war.	Writing a sequel chapter to the last in the book, Number the Stars, and identifying its subscript theme.

Element of Story	Book Models	Pupil Engagement Activities that Facilitate Literary Sensitivity and Understanding	Writing Response/ Rehearsal Activities
Format, Illustrations Other Print Features	Noah's Ark by Peter Spier	Examination of the intricate details in illustrations and how details reflect the plot progression (i.e., the snails are last to board and depart from the ark.)	Creating a movie scroll story that reflects detail changes that match plot evolvement
	In Shadowland by Mitsumasa Anno	Discussion of the illustrator's development of two separated stories at outset through use of more conventional illustrations for one story and silhouette cutouts for the second story.	Designing unique artistry to accompany a written poem
	Lincoln: A Photo Biography by Russell Freedman	Attention to and discussion of the effective use of photographs in the genre of biography	Developing own autobiography and using photos for documentation.